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Macready's Triumph:

The Restoration of *King Lear* to the British Stage

Emily Mullin

On the evening of January 25, 1838, at the Covent Garden Theatre in London, the curtain opened on the first performance of *King Lear* to restore Shakespeare's original story to the stage. For the first time in over one hundred and fifty years, under the influence of the tragedian and manager William Charles Macready, the play ended tragically, included Shakespeare's Fool, and refrained from interjecting a romance between Cordelia and Edgar. This performance represents an essential moment in the study of Shakespearean criticism and understanding: until 1838 it was believed that *Lear* could not be represented onstage,¹ that "classical" performances in general were unprofitable,² and that the story of *Lear*, in particular, was distasteful to the public.³ But, while it may appear that Macready's performance broke with all previous tradition, it was the culmination of previous scholarship and theatrical efforts that led to its production.

Examining the 1838 production of *Lear* and situating it as precisely as possible in its theatrical, critical, and artistic context, reveals the way in which this context played a role in the artistic choices Macready made. By taking into account contemporary nineteenth century scholarship on *King Lear* and learning from previous productions in its interpretation of the play, Macready's performance unified two flanks that had been previously divided without apparent hope of reconciliation. Thus, the 1838 production of *King Lear* represents a vital moment in Shakespearean scholarship—the union, however brief, of the scholars and the theatre.

Perhaps the most brazen theatrical approach came in 1681 when Nahum Tate decided to rewrite the play almost entirely. Tate's "revision" of *Lear* was by no means an isolated incident of theatrical vandalism. During the Restoration, many of Shakespeare's plays were rewritten: the plots and language were simplified and condensed under the influence of neoclassical rules. Tate's revision of *Lear* governed the production history of *Lear* for the next century—it was astoundingly popular, effectively replacing Shakespeare's text until Macready brought it back in 1838. The changes Tate made became points of debate for actors and critics, subsequently crystallizing the debate over *Lear's* interpretation as the century progressed. Thus, the first step

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towards defining Shakespeare's *Lear* onstage became defying the previous interpretation that had dominated it for so long.

Tate based his rendition on the principles of neoclassicism, specifically the Unities, as well as the predominating Augustan ideals of tragedy.⁴ In terms of neoclassical rules, the Unity of Action concerned Tate the most. The lack of cohesion between the *Lear* and Gloucester stories spurred him to invent a romance between Edgar and Cordelia—of which he was immensely proud, lauding it specifically in his introduction to the play.⁵ Bringing Edgar and Cordelia together unified the two plots, creating a Unity of Action, what he termed “Regularity,”⁶ not present in Shakespeare. The romance served Tate's other purposes as well—to create a logical tragedy in which the motivations of the characters became logical and even admirable.⁷

In order to explain Lear's temperament and later madness, Tate foreshadowed it. Just before Lear's entrance, Kent, now Lear's “physician,” exclaims, “I grieve to see him with such wild starts of passion hourly seiz'd,/ As it render Majesty beneath it self.”⁸ To which Gloucester replies, “Alas! 'tis the Infirmary of his Age,/Yet has his Temper ever been unfixt,/Chol'rick and suddain...”⁹ Thus, Lear became incarnated not just as an old man, but as one whose temper defined his character throughout his life and degraded the throne.

Tate's final, and most substantial, change to the play was the ending. He dethroned the tragedy by ending the piece as a romance, in which Lear and Cordelia survive and Edgar marries Cordelia. Tate's discomfort with the ending can hardly be attributed to his ignorance of literature. Even Shakespearean scholar A.C. Bradley, in his chef-d'oeuvre *Shakespearean Tragedy*, could barely reconcile himself to *Lear's* ending.¹⁰ However, Tate's immediate motivation for the changes lay in his interpretation. Tate saw *Lear* as a play about redemption and filial tenderness, and for that reason, saw no necessity in a tragic ending.¹¹ In this story, the recognition scene, not the deaths of Lear and Cordelia, became the most important scene of the play. Thus, a tragedy would have been counterproductive to the moral he was trying to convey.

Making the play moral certainly fit within the context of the eighteenth century. Joseph Donohue noted in *The Cambridge History of Theatre*, by the late 1600s, “a society and a theatrical audience were developing which increasingly looked to plays to set examples of refined, morally upright conduct.”¹² Critics and audiences met Tate's alteration of the ending with approbation, and in many ways this moral ending stood in the way of *Lear's* restoration to the stage simply because it was so satisfying. As late as 1774,

after Garrick had begun to restore Shakespeare's text, William Richardson wrote, "[t]he morals of Shakespeare's plays are, in general, extremely natural and just; yet, why must innocence unnecessarily suffer? Why must the hoary, the venerable Lear be brought with sorrow to the grave? Why must Cordelia perish by an untimely fate?"¹³ Thus, we can see to what extent almost a century later the audience and critics still approved of Tate's interpretation.

Though the ending of *Lear* would inhibit its restoration during the eighteenth century, by 1742, David Garrick began putting Shakespeare back onstage. Garrick's interpretation of *Lear* and his newfound respect for Shakespearean verse contributed to the growing understanding of the play. Garrick's performance as *Lear* set the tone for all performances to follow; even Macready considered Garrick's *Lear* when he began to construct his own. Thus, in order to understand *Lear* in 1838, we should first examine *Lear* in the mid-eighteenth century.

Lear was Garrick's "chef d'oeuvre:"¹⁴ Garrick as *Lear* was "a little, old, white haired man, with spindle-shanks, a tottering gait, and great shoes upon his little feet."¹⁵ His personal take on the character demonstrates a remarkably unique understanding of the famous king:

"Lear is certainly a weak man, it is part of his character—violent, old, and weakly fond of his daughters... his weakness proceeds from his age (four score & upwards) and such an old man full of affection, generosity, passion and what not meeting with what he thought an ungrateful return from his best belov'd Cordelia."¹⁶

Lear's weakness, particularly in madness, was incarnated in Garrick's physicality of him: "[h]e had no sudden starts, no violent gesticulation; his movements were slow and feeble; misery was depicted in his countenance."¹⁷ Garrick's model for *Lear* demonstrates that his conception of the character was based on pathos and senescence; *Lear*'s madness comes out of extreme grief, and is manifested by a slowing down of the mental processes, not frenzy.

At the beginning of his career, Garrick played Tate's *Lear*, though he later worked to restore more and more of Shakespeare's original text. He never reached the point, however, where he cut the love story between Edgar and Cordelia, included the tragic ending, or added the Fool. His restorations remained purely textual and organizational, changing little of Tate's plot. George Stone attributed Garrick's conservatism on these points to economic concerns: "[e]xamination of Garrick's entire connection with the versions of Shakespeare and Tate... demonstrates the dilemma of an eighteenth-century mind caught between an ideal liking for Shakespeare and a canny

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William Macready as King Lear with Helen Faucit as Cordelia.

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understanding of box-office appeal.”¹⁴

Indeed, Garrick's choice to retain the romance between Edgar and Cordelia proved to be the wisest choice he could have made at the time. On February 20, 1768, George Colman, inspired by Garrick's restorations of Shakespeare, staged an alteration of *King Lear* omitting the romance, though it retained the happy ending and still excluded the Fool. The *Theatrical Review* declared, “[w]e think his having restored the original...is a circumstance not greatly in favour of humanity or delicacy of feeling, since it is now, rather too shocking to be bourne; and the rejecting of the Episode of the loves of Edgar and Cordelia, so happily conceived by Tate, has, beyond all doubt, greatly weakened the Piece.”¹⁵ The critical outrage sunk Coleman's piece into obscurity. Years later, Macready wrote, “I believe the elder Colman put out an alteration, but I question whether it was acted; certainly it did not hold its place on the stage.”¹⁶ Thus, despite the progress made during the eighteenth century in restoring Shakespeare's text, it left much to be desired. Tate's version still held sway. However, off-stage, Shakespearean criticism also progressed.

After Garrick's retirement in 1776, the critics took center stage in *Lear's* development. Because of King George III's impending madness, from 1780 until 1810, *Lear* was rarely performed, and banned outright from 1810 until the king's death in 1820. In some ways, this hiatus in stage production allowed Shakespeare's *Lear* to gain ground against Tate's version. But, between 1780 and the early nineteenth century, other factors changed as well that may have predisposed the Regency era towards the darker, Shakespearean *King Lear*. Victor Hugo declared, “The nineteenth century has for its august mother the French Revolution... [it] has for family itself, and itself alone. It is characteristic of its revolutionary nature to dispense with ancestors.”¹⁷ In the revolutionary spirit, then, theatre critics began to dispense with the regulations that had governed the theatre throughout the eighteenth century. The sentiment against Tate only grew stronger, even to the point of critiquing Garrick himself for playing Tate's version. Charles Lamb, the renowned Shakespearean scholar declared, “I am almost disposed to deny to Garrick the merit of being an admirer of Shakespeare. A true lover of his excellences he certainly was not—for any true lover of them have admitted into his matchless scenes such ribald trash as Tate... [has] foisted into the acting [play] of Shakespeare?”¹⁸

Psychology became a predominating interest of critics, particularly the episodes of *Lear's* madness. The 1780s also saw the rise of interest in

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the character of the Fool, though within the context of examining Lear's character.¹⁹ In fact, the passion of the critics for the play's psychological and philosophical depth led Charles Lamb to declare in 1812,

"The *Lear* of Shakespeare cannot be acted. The contemptible machinery by which they mimic the storm which he goes out in, is not more inadequate to represent the horrors of the real elements, than any actor can be to represent Lear... Lear is essentially impossible to be represented on a stage."²⁰

His opinion that *Lear* did not belong onstage would remain the popular critical opinion, and would be, perhaps, verified, by the subsequent productions of the play—all of which failed to meet the theatrical and intellectual demands.

When *King Lear* officially returned to the stage after King George III's death, Edmund Kean, the passionate, romantic star of the early nineteenth century stage, resolved to step into Garrick's shoes as the man to take steps towards restoring the original story of *King Lear*. Though the first revival of the play, in 1820, was Tate's version, on February 10, 1823, Kean decided to play *Lear* with the restored tragic ending. Kean had evidently declared his intentions that the audience should "see him over the dead body of Cordelia" even before 1820; the theatre critic Hazlitt went so far as to suggest that Kean's poor Lear in 1820 was acted "out of spite."²¹ Kean's restoration of the ending was apparently a personal goal, though he restored little else in the play. The love-story between Edgar and Cordelia remained, and the Fool was still absent. The reviewer from the *John Bull* observed,

"We were a good deal disappointed on visiting the theatre to find that no steps had been taken to knock away Tate's plastering and restore the original beautiful structure other than concerns the last act, and that all the mawkish love-scenes of the bungler were still suffered to encumber the splendid work of the bard."²²

However, Kean's restoration of the ending was a tremendous step forward for the stage. As Odell notes, "in face of the accumulated opinion of the eighteenth century that the death of Lear and Cordelia on the stage 'would never do...' Kean proved that it would."²³ Kean's performance, regardless of its failings, moved the story of *King Lear* towards a full restoration.

In addition, Kean took steps towards theatrical realism in his interpretation: he was determined to have a realistic storm inside the theatre. Kean envisioned a tempest driven by mechanical effects he had seen demonstrated at a mechanical exhibition. The effect was elaborate: "The scenic trees were composed to distinct boughs which undulated in the

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wind, each leaf was a separate pendant rustling with the expressive sound of nature itself.”²⁴ Unfortunately, the storm was so accurate that according to the review in the *Times*, Kean “could scarcely be heard amid the confusion.”²⁵ Macready probably read the cautionary line in the *Times*, “[Kean] should have recollected that it is the bending of Lear’s mind under his wrongs that is the object of interest, and not that of a forest beneath the hurricane.”²⁶

Unfortunately for Kean, despite his attempts at progress, the production itself was unsuccessful, not only because of the production values but because of Kean’s melodramatic performance as Lear. The failure to represent the tragic king only seemed to verify Charles Lamb’s definitive statement that Lear could not be acted. Critics continued to assert that the only way to experience *King Lear* was to read it. Keats’ poem “On sitting Down to Read King Lear Once Again” demonstrated to what extent *Lear* had become a solitary, literary experience during the early nineteenth century. Lamb, too, asserted that only through reading *Lear* will we experience the play: “On the stage we see nothing but corporal infirmities and weakness, the impotence of rage; while we read it, we see not Lear, but we are Lear.”²⁷

Given this split between *Lear*’s life as a literary work and theatrical piece, Macready was the ideal actor to unify the two worlds. He represented the only person capable of doing justice to Shakespeare’s *Lear* onstage, “[a] man who passed his life at odds with the profession he led.”²⁸ Unlike Garrick, Macready cared more for the theatre as an entity than for his own popularity. Because the cultural climate of London had changed, a restoration of Shakespeare’s *King Lear* was daring, but not necessarily unthinkable. The danger was not so much in doing it, but in doing it right.

Macready spent his entire life working to elevate the theatre. He explained, “Among my motives the primary one was the wish to elevate my art and to establish an asylum for it.”²⁹ The lack of financial motives gave Macready a freedom that Garrick never had: he could challenge the status quo of the theatre. In doing so, he hoped “to establish a theatre in regard to decorum and taste, worthy of our country, and have in it the plays of our divine Shakespeare, fitly illustrated...”³⁰ Macready elevated “divine” Shakespeare beyond the pedestal Garrick had placed him on. In a sense, his desire to refine Shakespeare made him more of a Shakespearean critic than a man of the theatre. He detested the rewrites and any attempt to “improve” Shakespeare, particularly when the changes were made by managers in order to make a profit. In 1836, Macready went so far as to physically attack his manager, Alfred Bunn, for forcing him to play a truncated version of *Richard III* that

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ended at Act III. After this episode, which banned him from the Drury Lane Theatre, Macready found that he would be forever dissatisfied with his profession unless he controlled his own productions.

As an actor, Macready applied his intellectual appreciation of Shakespeare. He studied his parts intensely and spent hours simply reading the plays he performed. George Vanderhoff, a fellow actor, described him as merging the two styles of the actors that preceded him, Kemble, a studious actor who specialized in elocution, and the passionate Kean: “[h]e tried to blend the classic art of the one with the impulsive intensity of the other; and he overlaid both with an outer-plating of his own, highly artificial and elaborately formal.”³¹ Macready’s peers often noted that his diligence allowed him to change acting styles depending on the part he played.³² In his youth, his fellow actors ridiculed him for “acting” during rehearsals that were generally little more than walk-throughs.³³ In fact, the first chance he had to play Lear, in 1820 (a feeble attempt to challenge Kean’s first revival), he turned down because he believed he would not be able to study Lear adequately in just a few weeks. Instead, he appeared as Edmund.³⁴

After turning down the opportunity in 1820, Macready first appeared as Lear in London during the 1834 production at Drury Lane. Trewin described the performance as “a fairly reasonable version, for though the Fool was still un-restored, he had managed to lop most of Tate’s foolishness, and Shakespeare’s last act was played as it had been a decade before in the Kean-and-Elliston revival.”³⁵ Thus, Macready furnished the second step towards a complete restoration of Shakespeare’s *Lear*: the love story had finally been cut, and only the Fool remained to be restored—though that omission alone left a considerable amount of text un-spoken onstage. Given that that Fool could be considered the most risky element of Shakespeare’s *Lear* to restore (Macready would believe so as well in 1838), Mr. Bunn would doubtless not approve of his appearance in the piece. Certainly, Macready’s own lack of influence over productions, specifically his inability to curb cuts to Shakespeare’s work, eventually contributed to his decision to become the manager of Covent Garden.

On September 30, 1837, Macready opened his first performance as manager of the Covent Garden Theatre in London. In a public address to the house he announced that the “decline of drama, as a branch of English literature [is] a matter of public notoriety; that [he] hoped to advanced it as a branch of national literature and art.”³⁶ Not far away, Alfred Bunn, now Macready’s rival, retorted publicly that classical plays have always shown

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heavy losses and contemporary plays heavy gains, so “the public had what it wanted.”³⁷ Throughout the season, the two theatres competed publicly for audiences; the common rivalry between theatres was spurred by the ideological and personal differences between the two managers. But, by January 1837, it appeared Bunn was right— Macready announced that Covent Garden had lost £ 3,000. In a daring, and perhaps reckless, decision to recuperate losses and jump-start the season in the New Year, Macready announced that he would restore *King Lear* to the stage, “as Shakespeare wrote it, with the character of the Fool, and without the silly manipulation...that had so long disgraced the stage.”³⁸ Thus, *King Lear* became a last hope for Macready's plan to elevate the theatre and restore Shakespeare to its rightful place on the English stage.

The artistic choices that went into the 1838 production of *King Lear* deserve attention as a way of defining how this performance was a keystone moment in *Lear's* production history. The sheer fact that Macready stuck to Shakespeare's original plot as much as possible (despite rather judicious textual cuts), and that he removed the love-story and restored the Fool, singled out this performance. But the production itself—Macready's interpretation of Lear's character, the illustration of the Fool, and the set design—distinguished the 1838 *King Lear* as a defining moment that changed the course of the play's production history. Through the artistic choices made, the performance commented on contemporary artistic theory, while at the same time defined and developed a unique critical interpretation of the play.

Unlike other portrayals of Lear, Macready's did not begin as a senile old man or a weakened monarch, but as a strong vigorous king whose “overwhelming passion in his worn-out frame...[hastened] the passage from a healthy understanding to a disordered one.”³⁹ In Macready's interpretation, Lear's passion, insupportable in his old age, causes his madness. Macready, writing to a friend, explained his understanding of Lear, and shed light on his portrayal of the character:

“Most actors, Garrick, Kemble and Kean among others, seemed to have based their conception of the character on the infirmity usually associated with ‘four score and upwards,’ and have represented the feebleness instead of the vigour of old age. But Lear's was in truth a ‘lusty winter:’ his language never betrays imbecility of mind or body. He confers his kingdom indeed on ‘younger strengths:’ but there is still sufficient invigorating him [sic] to allow him to ride, to hunt, to run wildly through the fury of the storm, to slay the ruffian who murdered his Cordelia, and to bear about her dead

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body in his arms... Indeed the towering rage of thought with which his mind dilates identifying the heavens themselves with his griefs, [sic] and the power of conceiving such vast imaginings, would seem incompatible with a tottering, trembling frame, and betoken rather one of 'mighty bone and bold emprise,' in the outward bearing of a grand old man."⁴⁰

The passion and vigor Macready found in Lear, contrary to other representations, not only redefined the character for the 19th Century audience, but also suggested a different interpretation of the play. Macready conceived of Lear as a powerful monarch, one who commanded respect and wielded authority.

However, as Lady Pollock observed, Macready also created a character whose self-conception did not match reality. His body could not support his passion. We might conclude that Lear's giant mistake—disinheriting Cordelia—did not stem from senility (even passionate), but from his "outward bearing of a grand old man." In Lear's vigorousness, Macready had given him a tragic flaw—almost as if he borrowed from classical theatre tradition. Perhaps this is what he referred to when he wrote in his diary after rehearsals that his version of Lear was "very striking [to a] classic eye."⁴¹

We may better understand Macready's interpretation of Lear by understanding the critical environment in which he worked. In addition to the actors who conceived weak Lears, each of the critics had their own interpretation of Lear's character, many of which Macready read during his study of the play.⁴² Hazlitt's observations on Lear, from *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* written in 1817, demonstrated what Macready was most likely not aiming for in his interpretation: "It is [Lear's] rash haste, his violent impetuosity, his blindness to everything but the dictates of his passions or affections, that produces all his misfortunes, that aggravates his impatience of them, that enforces our pity for him."⁴³ Hazlitt characterized Lear as a child, or perhaps more appropriately, as a selfish, senile old man unable to see anything but his own wants or needs. Of Hazlitt's observations Macready wrote, "[w]hat conceited trash that man has thought to pass upon the public."⁴⁴

On the other hand, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, a Shakespearean critic Macready respected, conceived of Lear very differently. Macready attended all of Coleridge's lectures on Shakespeare, so we can assume Macready would have been familiar with Coleridge's opinions on Lear.⁴⁵ Coleridge's analysis forgave more than Hazlitt's, and emphasized Lear's humanity. He blamed Lear's misfortunes on "the strange yet by no means unnatural, mixture of selfishness, sensibility, and habit of feeling derived from and fostered by the

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particular rank and usages of the individual.”⁴⁶ He did not shy away from addressing old age, either: “[i]n Lear, old age is itself a character, its natural imperfections being increased by lifelong habits of receiving a prompt obedience.”⁴⁷ Macready’s portrayal of Lear embodied these two descriptions fairly closely. Macready mentioned Lear’s “outward bearing of a grand old man,”⁴⁸ which mimicked Coleridge’s conviction of rank and perhaps selfishness as well. Thus, by creating a “vigorous” Lear, Macready situated his production among the ranks of Shakespearean critics. His conception of Lear became a unique interpretation that participated in the contemporary discussion surrounding Lear’s character.

Macready’s incarnation of Lear was certainly not the only innovation he brought to the performance. His most notable contribution to the play was the restoration of the Fool, brought back for the first time since Tate. The restoration of the Fool was the only element of the play that had not yet been seen onstage by 1837. The characterization of the Fool in Macready’s performance clearly demonstrated the way in which this production of *King Lear* fit into the contemporary conception of the play. The Fool, although a new addition, enabled the play to adhere to tradition while at the same time incorporating the new character of Lear that Macready developed.

The neoclassical rules that governed Tate demanded the elimination of the Fool in the name of purifying the tragedy. While some of the stringent neoclassical ideals such as Unity of Place and Time came to be questioned in the late eighteenth century, this particular rule, a part of Unity of Action, was still upheld. In the advertisement for his 1768 performance, George Colman wrote, “I had once some idea of retaining the Fool, but after the most serious consideration I was convinced that such a character in a Tragedy would not be endured on the modern stage.”⁴⁹ Writing in his journal after the first rehearsal of *King Lear* in 1838, Macready expressed similar hesitations with regard to the character of the Fool: “[m]y opinion of the introduction of the Fool is that, like many such terrible contrasts in poetry and painting, in acting representation it will fail of effect; it will either weary and annoy or distract the spectators. I have no hope of it and think that at the last we shall be obliged to dispense with it.”⁵⁰ Thus, he illustrated the continuing discomfort with the Fool, even in nineteenth century aesthetics. A few days later, instead of cutting the Fool, he cut the actor who played the Fool. Macready strove to find a balance between what he saw as theatrical integrity in the restoration of Shakespeare and character of the Fool whom he did not believe could be restored.

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Priscilla Horton as Ariel in *The Tempest*, 1838.

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In order to realize his vision of the Fool (and consequentially *King Lear* as a whole) Macready made an unpredictable choice—he cast a woman in the part. He had originally cast Drinkwater Meadows, “a capable, routine actor,” according to Trewin.⁵¹ On the second day of rehearsal Meadows was out and Priscilla Horton was in. His decision to cast Priscilla Horton after so few rehearsals shows us Macready’s vision of the Fool and his intentions for *Lear*. He used the Fool as a comparison to Cordelia in order to heighten the pathos and family drama.

When Macready complained about Meadows, he explained his vision of what the fool should be: “a sort of fragile, hectic, beautiful-faced, half-idiot-looking boy.”⁵² His friend and fellow actor Bartley suggested that a woman should play the role and Macready “caught at the idea and instantly exclaimed: ‘Miss P. Horton is the very person.’ [He] was delighted at the thought.”⁵³ Macready’s delight tells us that Priscilla Horton brought very particular characteristics to her role as the Fool. She was not just any actress: renown for her agile dancing and contralto singing voice, she was also very young—she turned twenty just two days before rehearsals began. She would later be most remembered for playing Ariel in Macready’s *Tempest*. In the drawing of Priscilla as Ariel, we have an image of what Macready’s Fool would have been—slender, “fragile,” and certainly, “beautiful-faced.” A reviewer of Priscilla’s performance noted, “Her ‘poor fool and knave’ is perhaps not that of Shakespeare... Still hers is a most pleasing performance, giving evidence of deep feelings; and she trills forth the snatches of song with the mingled archness and pathos of their own exquisite simplicity.”⁵⁴ Charles Dickens was also quite struck by her performance, declaring it, “as exquisite a performance as the stage has ever boasted.”⁵⁵

In casting the Fool as a beautiful girl, Macready’s interpretation contrasted significantly with later harsh interpretations of the Fool. In the twentieth century, Harold Bloom even went so far as to give the Fool partial responsibility for Lear’s madness: “on some level of purposiveness, however repressed, the Fool does labor to destroy Lear’s sanity.”⁵⁶ Instead, Macready’s Fool was meant, in the spirit of contemporary criticism, as a contrast to Lear. Charles Dickens attested in his review of Macready’s *Lear*, “[the Fool] is interwoven with Lear, he is the link that still associates him with Cordelia’s love, and the presence of the regal estate he has surrendered.”⁵⁷ Furthermore, the Fool’s femininity may have been meant to reference Cordelia and thus heighten the pathos of the family tragedy.

Macready used the visual image of the Fool as a young woman to strengthen

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the pathos of the play. The actress who played Cordelia, Helen Faucit, was just twenty-one at the time of production, and we can see in the illustration that she had the same slender, "fragile," structure and delicate features as Priscilla Horton. Thus, in playing Lear as caring for the Fool, as opposed to being "[blind] to everything but the dictates of his passions or affections" ⁵⁸ as Hazlitt believed, Macready demonstrated that Lear, though passionate, retained a consciousness of others' feelings.

Furthermore, in heightening the resemblance onstage between the Fool and Cordelia and in creating an affiliation between the two characters in Lear's mind, Macready escalated the family drama of *King Lear*. According to J.S. Bratton, "the essential Lear [of the nineteenth century] is a tale of 'filial tenderness and parental suffering.'" ⁵⁹ Bratton blamed this interpretation on the "Victorian failure to come to grips with *King Lear*." ⁶⁰ If the heart of the piece is Lear's parental anguish, then the resolution of the play becomes the recognition scene, and theatrical intuition says to end the play happily, as Tate, Garrick, and many others did.

Perhaps in other interpretations it may be true that the interest in familial tenderness prevents the audience from appreciating the play, but in Macready's *Lear*, Lear's 'parental suffering' may have increased the public's ability to relate to the story. As we have examined, Macready's conception of Lear's character was not the weak, unhappy father of previous performances. Instead, he embodied the grandeur of a king—he gave orders and expected to be obeyed. His role as a father, then, became just one aspect of his character, not its entirety. The Fool allowed Macready to stray from the familiar conception of Lear as "weakly fond of his daughters," ⁶¹ while still illustrating Lear's affection for Cordelia. Through the Fool, the public was able to recognize the Lear they understood from the past, and yet, at the same time, learn that the pathos they recognized was heightened in a stronger, more regal Lear.

Our final analysis of the 1838 *King Lear* examines Macready's choices in scenery. Macready's detailed representations of Shakespeare's plays proved not only memorable, but defined a new style for Shakespeare. It was, in fact, something very close to what Kean had attempted almost two decades before, except Macready insisted against "[having] the magnificence without the tragedy and the poet...swallowed up in display" ⁶² And unlike Kean, who was most interested in the possibility of spectacle, Macready's intention was "to give Shakespeare all his attributes, to enrich his poetry with scenes worthy of its interpretation, to give his tragedies their due magnificence." ⁶³

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Macready's *Lear* adhered to historical realism in a way the nineteenth century had rarely seen before. Judging by the scenic description, Macready staged the play as a historical piece in Saxon England, like all previous renditions.⁶⁴ However, his attention to detail—lightning that split the sky, sheeted elements, the trophies and instruments of war, and elaborate costumes for Lear's soldiers—showed a commitment to faithful representation beyond Garrick's Shakespearean costuming and proportional backdrops. While this effort resembled Kean's determination to have every individual leaf move during the storm scene, Macready's production aimed for realism that progressed into the realm of art. Christopher Baugh noted in "Stage Design from Lougherbourg to Poel," "paradoxically, the urge was, on the one hand, for greater reality, yet at the same time, it was reality composed and structured as pictorial art."⁶⁵ Macready borrowed from the aesthetics of the picturesque, as well as the historical costuming of Saxon England.

The 1838 performance of *Lear* was extraordinarily well received. The play revived the hopes of the Covent Garden Theatre and Macready's ambitions for Shakespearean restorations, capturing the praise of the critics for the entire season.⁶⁶ But, Macready's performance had its critics, most of whom complained of Macready's gradual development of Lear's character and his pathos.⁶⁷ Generally, however, reviews were favorable. The John Bull review declared,

"[*King Lear* was] commenced with such taste, and so admirably carried into effect by the manager of this theatre. Mr. Macready deserves, and will obtain, the deep respect and gratitude, not only of the playgoing but of the literary world, for his earnest and well-directed zeal to do honour to our nation's chieftest intellectual pride."⁶⁸

Dickens proudly asserted, "Mr. Macready's success has banished that disgrace [Tate] from the stage for ever."⁶⁹ Odell, writing in 1920 and looking back on the century agreed, "with this production the ghost of Nahum Tate—so far as England, if not America, was concerned—was laid forever." Macready himself noted after opening night, "the impression created by *King Lear* seemed to be wide and strong."⁷⁰ His *Lear* would be remembered as "one of [his] greatest performances and was perhaps of all the most universally admired; its effect upon an audience was immense."⁷¹ Subsequently, he continued to play Lear for the rest of his career with great success.

In 1838, William Macready's *King Lear* set the foundation for centuries of *Lear* exploration. His production built upon the innovations and interpretations of Tate, Garrick, and Kean, as well as the multitude of Shakespearean critics who

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first began to ask questions about Shakespeare's original. Macready's ability to comment on the current opinions circulating about *Lear* established the play as a piece to be respected onstage as well as off. In doing so, he not only commented on the contemporary criticism, but also contributed to it. The 1838 *King Lear* made decisions about the play that a scholarly written opinion simply could not: in the performance, the physicality of Lear illuminated his character; the actor (in this case, actress) chosen to play the Fool determined the audience's perception of the role; the authenticity of the scenery and the mechanics of the storm scene complemented the text, illuminating the story for the audience in a completely unique fashion. Macready envisioned Lear as more than a feeble old man, creating instead a vigorous King in "lusty winter."⁷² He recognized the importance of restoring the Fool, and how the Fool could be used to enrich the performance; he strove to visually "do justice" to Shakespeare's text onstage. In *King Lear*, Macready finally gave the public a glimpse of what the play could look like. We cannot say definitively that without Macready we would never have discovered the magnificence of *Lear* onstage, but we certainly would have discovered it differently, and probably at a later date. It took a particular type of actor to combine the criticism and scholarship of Shakespeare and represent it onstage. Thus, perhaps we might say that Macready's greatest triumph in crafting *King Lear* was simply defying the critical scholars and the conservative theatre managers by proving that the play could be performed onstage, and would continue to be performed, so long as there were men brave enough to tackle the tragedy.

¹ Charles Lamb, "On the Tragedies of Shakespeare, considered with reference to their fitness for stage," in *English Critical Essays* (Nineteenth Century, ed. Jones D. Edmund (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), 81, quoted in Susan Bruce ed. *Columbia Critical Guides William Shakespeare: King Lear*, ed., Susan Bruce (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 56.

² J.C Trewin, *Mr Macready: A Nineteenth-Century Tragedian and His Theatre* (London: George G. Harrap & Co., 1955), 135.

³ George Winchester Stone, "Garrick's King Lear: A Study in the Temper of the Eighteenth-Century Mind." *Studies in Philology* 45 (October 1964), 91.

⁴ Bruce, *Columbia Critical Guides*, 22-23.

⁵ Nahum Tate, "The History of King Lear," in *Five Restoration Adaptations of Shakespeare*, ed. Christopher Spencer (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965), 203.

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⁶ Ibid., 203.

⁷ Bruce, *Columbia Critical Guides*, 24.

⁸ Tate, 208. 1. 1. 51-53.

⁹ Ibid, 208. 1. 1. 54-55.

¹⁰ Bruce, *Columbia Critical Guides*, 97.

¹¹ J.S. Bratton, "The Lear of Private Life," in *Shakespeare at the Victorian Stage*, ed. Richard Foulkes (London: Society for Theatre Research, 2000), 136.

¹² Joseph Donohue, "Introduction to Part I 1660-1800," in *The Cambridge History of British Theatre*, ed. Joseph Donohue (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 16-17.

¹³ Bruce, *Columbia Critical Guides*, 25.

¹⁴ Stone, "Garrick's King Lear," 91.

¹⁵ *Theatrical Review* (1772), quoted in George C.D. Odell, *Shakespeare from Betterton to Irving*, Volume I (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), 381.

¹⁶ William Charles Macready, *Reminiscences* (New York, 1875), 697, quoted in Horace Howard Furness, ed. *A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare: King Lear* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1880), 478.

¹⁷ Victor Hugo, *William Shakespeare*, trans. Melville B. Anderson (London: George Routledge and Sons, n.d., 1864), 289, quoted in Bruce, *Columbia Critical Guides*, 48.

¹⁸ Lamb, "On the Tragedies of Shakespeare," 91-92, quoted in Bruce, *Columbia Critical Guides*, 49.

¹⁹ Bruce, *Columbia Critical Guides*, 1.

²⁰ Charles Lamb, "On the Tragedies of Shakespeare," in *Bloom's Shakespeare Through the Ages*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2008), 103-4.

²¹ William Hazlitt, *Hazlitt on Theatre*, ed. William Archer and Robert Lowe (New York: Hill and Wang, 1895), 191.

²² Review of *King Lear*, *John Bull* February 16, 1823, quoted in Odell, *Shakespeare from Betterton to Irving*, 156.

²³ Odell, *Shakespeare from Betterton to Irving*, 154.

²⁴ George Raymond, *The Life and Enterprises of Robert William Elliston, Comedian* (London: G. Routledge and Co., 1857), 281, quoted in Odell, *Shakespeare from Betterton to Irving*, 165.

²⁵ Review of *King Lear*, *The Times*, April 25, 1820, quoted in Odell, *Shakespeare from Betterton to Irving*, 165.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Lamb, "On the Tragedies," in Bloom, *Bloom's Shakespeare*, 103.

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- ²⁸ J.C Trewin, introduction to *The Journal of William Charles Macready 1832-1851*, by William Charles Macready, ed. J.C. Trewin (London: Longmans, Green and Co Ltd, 1967), xv.
- ²⁹ William Charles Macready, *Macready's Reminiscences, and Selections from his Diaries and Letters* Volume II, ed. Sir Frederick Pollock (London: Macmillan and Co, 1875), 114.
- ³⁰ Ibid., 370.
- ³¹ George Vanderhoff, quoted in Duclos 113.
- ³² Lady Pollock, *Macready as I Knew Him* (London: Remington and Co., 1885), 101-2.
- ³³ Duclos, "Actors of King Lear," 116.
- ³⁴ Trewin, *Mr. Macready*, 60.
- ³⁵ Ibid., 103.
- ³⁶ Arthur John Harris, "King Lear in the Theatre: A Study of the Play through the Performances of Kean, Macready, Irving, Gielgud, and Scofield" (Dissertation for Doctor of Philosophy, University of Birmingham, 1966), 196.
- ³⁷ Ibid., 135.
- ³⁸ Trewin, *Mr. Macready*, 139.
- ³⁹ Pollock, *Macready as I Knew Him*, 105.
- ⁴⁰ Grace Ippolo, ed., *Routledge Literary Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 2003), 79-80.
- ⁴¹ William Charles Macready, *The Journal of William Charles Macready 1832-1851*, ed. J.C. Trewin (London: Longmans, Green and Co Ltd, 1967), 113.
- ⁴² Ibid., 13, 249.
- ⁴³ William Hazlitt, *Characters of Shakespeares' Plays* (London: Dent: 1906), quoted in Bruce, *Columbia Critical Guides*, 76.
- ⁴⁴ Macready, *The Journal of William Charles Macready 1832-1851*, 13
- ⁴⁵ Pollock, *Macready as I Knew Him*, 23.
- ⁴⁶ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Coleridge's Criticism of Shakespeare*, ed. R.A. Foakes. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), 95.
- ⁴⁷ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Notes and Lectures upon Shakespeare Vol. 1*, ed. Mrs. H.N. Coleridge (London: William Pickering, p. 1849), 199.
- ⁴⁸ Ippolo, *Routledge Literary Sourcebook*, 80.
- ⁴⁹ Odell, *Shakespeare from Betterton to Irving*, 380.
- ⁵⁰ Macready, *The Journal of William Charles Macready 1832-1851*, 112.
- ⁵¹ Trewin, *Mr. Macready*, 139.
- ⁵² Macready, *The Journal of William Charles Macready 1832-1851*, 112.

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⁵³ Ibid., 113.

⁵⁴ *John Bull* review of *King Lear*, quoted in Odell, *Shakespeare from Betterton to Irving*, 195.

⁵⁵ Charles Dickens, "The Restoration of King Lear" in *Miscellaneous Papers*, Volume I (London: Chapman & Hall, Ltd, 1911), 81.

⁵⁶ Harold Bloom, introduction to 1992 edition of *King Lear* in *Bloom's Shakespeare Through the Ages*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2008), 313.

⁵⁷ Charles Dickens, "The Restoration of King Lear," in *Miscellaneous Papers*, 78.

⁵⁸ Hazlitt, *Characters*, quoted in Bruce, *Columbia Critical Guides*, 76.

⁵⁹ Bratton, "Lear of Private Life," 132.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 131.

⁶¹ David Garrick to Tighe, June 1773.

⁶² Lady Pollock, *Macready as I Knew Him*, 84.

⁶³ Ibid., 83.

⁶⁴ Bratton, "The Lear of Private Life," 127.

⁶⁵ Christopher Baugh, "Stage Design from Loughterbourg to Poel," in *The Cambridge History of British Theatre*, ed. Joseph Donohue (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 318.

⁶⁶ Odell, *Shakespeare from Betterton to Irving*, 194.

⁶⁷ Harris, "King Lear in the Theatre," 218.

⁶⁸ *John Bull* review of *King Lear*, quoted in Odell, *Shakespeare from Betterton to Irving*, 194.

⁶⁹ Dickens, "The Restoration of King Lear," 78.

⁷⁰ Macready, *The Journal of William Charles Macready 1832-1851*, 114.

⁷¹ Pollock, *Macready as I Knew Him*, 104.

⁷² Ippolo, *Routledge Literary Sourcebook*, 79-80.